

ZYGOTE

Zygote is loath to pay lip service to an intelligent spy bat, but he likes the sound of a neckband that converts nerve impulses into speech. Mind you, he's not sure he'd take that to the bank

DON'T BANK ON IT

When online customers accessed the HSBC website recently, they were greeted by a pop-up window that said the banking site could not be verified because its secure certificate had expired. This sort of warning is usually associated with rogue sites, identity fraud and phishing attacks, but HSBC did not seem to be in the slightest bit concerned. It put out a brief statement saying, "There were no security risks associated with the certificate expiring". It added that the problem only affected people who had configured their browsers "in a certain way".

In other words, HSBC has advised its customers that false security certificates are fine, and there is probably no point in having certificates at all, so why don't you all set your browsers to Trust Every Bugger With My Financial Details? However, Zygote knows who will be blamed if HSBC customers fall victims of online fraud, and it certainly won't be the bank.

CHIP SHOP

It is not often that Zygote congratulates the current US government on its social policies. However, its continuing campaign against online gambling is at least aimed at the right targets. They have already hit individuals who promote betting sites, and more importantly they have gone after credit card companies who process

the online bets. Now they are gunning for major corporates who have facilitated gambling adverts via the internet, and the financial penalties are very heavy indeed.

Microsoft, Google and Yahoo! have been forced to stump up over 30 million dollars (about £14,925,373.17p). The bulk of the cash is going towards an anti-gambling advertising campaign aimed at young people, along with donations to kids' charities and the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. Bravo!

Meanwhile, the UK is squealing and squirming against US policies that discriminate against online businesses operated from within our own shores. Casino sites and virtual chips are completely legal in this country and so are online advertisements for internet betting, but there is nothing to prevent them being accessed from the USA.

Zygote awaits the first test case of a UK company getting shopped to Uncle Sam for promoting illegal gambling to our American cousins.

HEAR AND NOW

This year, we are celebrating the tenth birthday of the first commercially available MP3 player, the MPMan-F10. It was made in Korea, it measured 90x70x16mm, it connected to a clunky parallel port, and it boasted 32MB of flash memory. Amazingly, consumers were willing to pay up to two hundred quid for the privilege of

listening to six tracks of solid-state, portable, digital music of rubbish quality through poxy little earphones.

Ten years later, the technology has evolved beyond recognition, with 160GB MP3 players on the market. Consumers are now willing to pay up to two hundred quid for the privilege of listening to 40,000 tracks of solid-state, portable, digital music of rubbish quality through poxy little earphones.

WINGING IT

A miniature intelligent spy plane is being developed at the University of Michigan, thanks to a generous multi-million dollar research budget funded by the US Army. The flying robot has a six-inch wingspan and is aerodynamically modelled on the flight of the common bat.

Zygote looks forward to a companion robot modelled on the common Robin Boy Wonder. Or how about a computer-controlled nocturnal spy plane that sleeps in a coffin and sucks the blood of the enemy after biting them in the neck?

Speaking of which...

NECK TIED

Zygote was never sure why Frankenstein's monster had a bolt through his neck, but if it was intended to hold a voice-box in place, then the experiment failed.

Now the Ambient Corporation of Dallas has developed the Audeo, which is an electronic neckband designed to convert nerve signals sent to a human thorax into computer-generated speech.

So far, the Audeo device has a vocabulary of about 150 words, and it needs training by the individual user. The manufacturers say that users need to "think specifically about voicing words for them to be picked up by the equipment". They are working on increasing the machine's intelligence to identify phonemes – the individual building blocks of speech. This will allow users to generate an unlimited vocabulary. The system will help people who do not have the ability to speak normally. It will also help secret service agents who want to relay speech without having to move their lips.

Let's hope the Audeo software can be trained to control itself and prevent spontaneous vocalisations of nerve signals such as, "Wow! Look at the arse on that!"

ME OLD CHINA

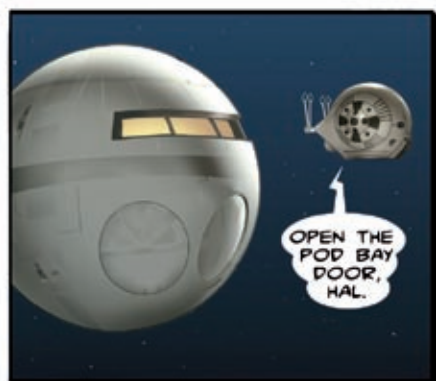
By the time this magazine hits the shelves, China will have overtaken the United States as the dominant power on the web. With over 221 million citizens connected to the internet, the Chinese will have knocked America's 215 million surfers off the top tier, and the gap is due to widen dramatically.

The US enjoys a saturated 70 per cent user rate compared to a modest 16 per cent in China. Because the Chinese economy is booming compared with the recession threatening its Western rivals, internet usage in China is growing exponentially.

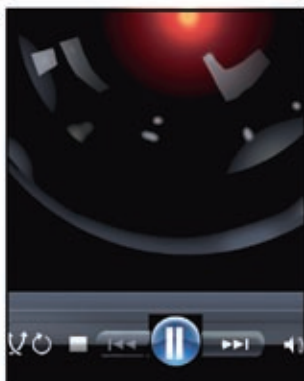
But rest assured, dear reader, Zygote cannot see these facts affecting our lives in the near future as long as huan ying, ni hao ma. Ni hui jiang yingyu ma? **ES**

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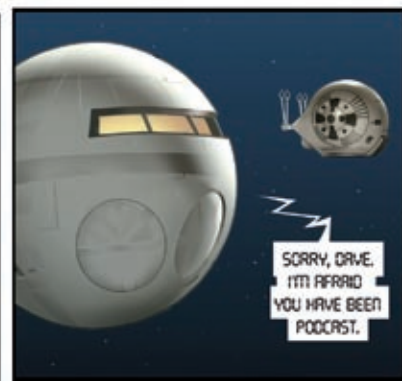
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